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Identifying and Using Resources

→ Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide participants with information and strategies that will lead to the identification of the resources needed to successfully implement specific school improvement plans and the delineation of those resources that are currently available and those that need to be developed/generated.

→ Outcomes

- Participants will demonstrate the ability to identify the resources necessary to effectively implement proposed district improvement activities.
- Participants will be able to identify currently available resources that are necessary to implement proposed improvement activities.

Identifying Resources

Resource Overview

This section provides a general process that can be used to help local school districts develop improvement plans; determine the resources they will need to successfully implement a plan; identify those resources that are currently accessible through the

district and those that will need to be developed or generated; acquire these additional resources; monitor resource use as improvement plans are implemented; and ensure that sufficient resources are available to sustain successful improvement efforts on a long-term basis. A set of strategies is then proposed for utilizing the information generated through the resource identification and development process to generate cost-effective budgets for improvement plans.

Scoring Guide- Resources

- ✓ Resources currently available to support implementation of the activity are identified and include resources outside and/or inside the district.
- ✓ The district indicates how the strategy will be sustained following completion of the grant funding

Strategies for Identifying Resources

There are number of steps to the identification of resources necessary to effectively carry out any project, including school improvement plans. Following these steps will not only increase the likelihood that sufficient resources are available to initiate the implementation of a program, but allow for additional resources to be generated over time to ensure long-term sustainability. The proposed resource identification and development process has five steps, each of which is linked with a step in the generation of a formal budget for the improvement plan. Steps to resource identification and development include:

- Improvement Plan Resource Investigation
- Development of Resource Requirement Definitions
- Resource and Budget Design
- Resource Monitoring
- Ensuring Sustainability

Initial Resource Investigation

Following the development of an action plan, the first step in determining resources needed for implementation entails an initial investigation or estimation of necessary assets. Resources for improvement activities can be thought of as falling into one of several broad categories, each of which should be considered:

- Purchased Services;
- Salaries;
- Supplies and Material Resources;

In conducting an initial resource investigation, an improvement planning team needs to carefully consider each of the major activities that will be undertaken as part of the improvement plan and develop a rough estimate of the resources within each of the above areas that will be necessary to successfully implement and evaluate the program.

Resource Requirement Definitions

A second step in the resource identification process involves the further specification of those resources identified in initial resource investigation as required for a proposed improvement activity. During this step, the improvement planning team will need to take a careful look to determine if all critical resources have been identified and add specific details to each resource necessary to effectively carry out each aspect of the action plan/improvement activity.

Purchased Services (Consultants)

Professional and technical services refer to those supports which can be performed only by persons with specialized skills and knowledge. Included are the services of other school districts, as well as non- LEA consultants. For the most part, resources in this area will be necessary for the provision of training and technical assistance to one or more groups of stakeholders. Determination of the extent to which professional and technical services are needed will depend on the specific nature and scope of improvement activities, as well as the in-house resources LEAs have available. Factors to consider when reflecting on the need for professional and technical resources include the:

- Specific type, nature, and amount of training and technical assistance necessary to implement the improvement activity;
- Need for on-going, periodic, or single session training; and
- Number and types of stakeholder groups that need to be trained (e.g., supervisory and direct service personnel; parents, other volunteers etc.).

Salaries

In determining the personnel necessary to implement improvement activities, planning teams should ask the question, “What human resources/personnel will be necessary to implement and evaluate the improvement plan and activities?” As this resource is being considered, teams may find it advantageous to adopt a broad definition of the term human resources, taking into consideration both supervisory and front line personnel from the LEA, individuals who are not employed by the LEA (e.g., RPDC staff), as well as non- professionals (e.g., community volunteers, parents).

The important questions to answer are:

- Who are the individuals necessary to carry out each component of an improvement activity?
- What are the number of hours that will be necessary to carry out these tasks?
- When will each person's efforts be needed?

Supplies and Materials

Although it may be nearly impossible to determine the exact nature of supplies and materials that will be critical to carrying out an improvement plan, planning teams can develop general estimates of the resources that will be needed in this area, taking into consideration the scope and nature of the proposed improvement activities. Some activities may target large numbers of students, parents, and/or educational staff. Others will focus on much smaller numbers. A single set of materials (e.g., a new reading curriculum) may be proposed to achieve an objective or many materials may be put forward as necessary to reach it (e.g., a new curriculum, a supplemental instructional DVD to reinforce classroom learning, and a training manual for teachers, etc). In general, resources in this area that will need to be considered include: curricula, training materials for staff, substitutes, supplemental classroom materials (e.g., software) and impact measure materials.

Identification of Currently Available Resources

To this point, the focus of this resource development process has centered on identifying the resources planning teams view as necessary to implement proposed improvement activities. No distinction has been made between resources that are currently available within the LEA and those that will need to be purchased or have a cost attached to them. At this juncture in the resource design process, the planning team will need to undertake some research to determine whether necessary resources are: (a) currently available for improvement activities with no additional costs associated with them; or (b) not available within the LEA and/or only available at additional cost.

Some resources, such as trainers who have the experience and expertise necessary to conduct large scale in-service instruction on a new reading curriculum or drop-out

prevention program, may not be available at all within the LEA. Other necessary supports may be available, but not to the extent necessary for the effective implementation of improvement activities. The additional time needed will then have a cost associated with its use.

At this point in the resource planning process, the planning team should review the resource requirements that have been developed for improvement activities making sure that they have been sufficiently specified. The type and amount of resources that are currently available to be used for improvement efforts, both within and outside of the LEA, should be noted along with the specific resource category into which they fall (i.e., human resources/personnel; supplies and materials; personnel; professional and technical services; other resources). Resources of both a formal (i.e., professional staff) and informal (e.g., volunteers) nature should be included. Teams should be as specific as possible in outlining not just the source and type of available support, but also the amount of the resource that will be available (e.g., number of hours/week that a staff person will be assigned to improvement efforts).

The final steps in this phase of the planning process entail identification of critical resources that are currently unavailable and must therefore be acquired, and a review of proposed improvement activities to reassess their feasibility. In conducting this review the planning team will need to carefully consider the extent to which the LEA is likely to be able to acquire necessary, but currently unavailable resources. At this point, the team may find it useful to assign monetary estimates to each unavailable resource viewed as critical to program implementation. This will provide information that will be useful in potential revisions to proposed activities. If access to currently unavailable resources is unlikely, the planning process will need to return to the activity development phase and plans simplified, scaled down, or revised in other ways that reduce the need for resources.

Acquiring Necessary Resources

Although LEAs may have many of the resources necessary to effectively implement school improvement plans, it is unlikely that ALL critical resources will be available in the amount needed. It therefore makes sense to develop a plan to obtain the

resources needed for activity implementation as part of the overall resource planning process.

There are a number of ways that additional resources can be accessed to support improvement activities. These include:

- State improvement grant funding
- Local foundation funding
- Parent volunteers
- Student volunteers
- Community volunteers

The improvement planning process contained in this manual will allow eligible LEAs to apply for state improvement grants through the Missouri DESE. State funding, however, is not the only option that LEAs have available. Private foundations, especially those that are local, often have significant funding available that can be accessed for activities that have the potential to enhance quality of life within the community. Efforts to improve the educational outcomes of students with disabilities easily fall within this funding area. While each foundation is likely to have a somewhat different process that must be followed to apply for funding, the information pulled together by LEAs as part of the DESE School Improvement Planning Process can provide the basis for a request for funding from these organizations.

Improvement planning teams should also consider the extent to which “informal” resources in the form of parent, student, and community volunteers are available to support improvement activities. All of these groups are likely to be supportive of improved educational outcomes for students with disabilities and provide a tremendous resource that often goes untapped. One strategy that will dramatically increase the likelihood of being able to successfully access these informal resources is to include these stakeholder groups at all stages of the improvement planning process.

Sustainability and the Use of In-Kind Resources

Improvement activities that cannot be sustained over a significant period will have little long-term impact on student achievement or outcomes. Planning teams therefore will need to consider how they will continue strategies that prove to be effective once initial funding and support is no longer available to the LEA. Two important processes that should be considered in order to increase the probability of sustainability are: (1) effective resource monitoring and (2) building into improvement efforts the extensive use of informal or already available resources.

Resource Monitoring and Replenishment

Improvement planning teams need to put into place strategies to effectively monitor the expenditure of resources so that they can be replenished when needed.

Resources of a fiscal nature are relatively easy to monitor. Most LEAs undertake this task on an ongoing basis. The key for improvement planning teams is to:

- Use established LEA procedures to monitor fiscal expenditures;
- Develop ways to monitor resources of the non-fiscal type (e.g., the use of parent volunteers);
- Establish tolerance parameters or “red flags” at which point improvement strategies will be re-examined; and
- Generate ways to ensure that resources are available on a long-term basis to sustain successful improvement efforts including the use of already available resources.

Resource planning is an inexact science. No matter how careful the process, the need for some resources will be underestimated and others overestimated. It will therefore be necessary for planning teams to develop ways through which they can use established procedures within the LEA to monitor, on an ongoing basis, fiscal expenditures associated with improvement activities.

LEAs should also put into place strategies for monitoring resources of a non-fiscal type. Parent volunteers, for example, can become burned-out if the same individuals are called time-after-time to support school initiatives. The same holds for student volunteers, as well as individuals and organizations within the community. Although

not as formal a process as monitoring fiscal expenditures, carefully tracking the degree to which informal resources are used and who provides the resource increases the likelihood that improvement efforts will be sustainable.

One way to ensure that resources are effectively managed is to establish tolerance parameters or “red flags” at which point resources, expenditures, and improvement strategies will be re-examined. This will ensure the LEA is meeting State and federal accountability requirements, make it possible for funding to be reallocated from one resource area to another when that is necessary, serve as a signal that some activities might need to be reduced in scope, or that additional funding is necessary.

The development of strategies to ensure that the resources necessary to sustain improvement activities are available should begin, not when the “resource account” is empty, but during the initial stages of the planning process. Even if it appears, for example, that sufficient funding to implement improvement activities will be available from a State grant source, districts should be thinking of how these activities can be funded following the termination of grant money. Investigating whether local foundations or the business community would be interested in providing long-term support for an initiative, and/or developing ongoing training programs for volunteers will increase the likelihood that resources will be replenished as they are used.

Districts can also increase the likelihood of sustainability through carefully conceptualizing improvement activities to make the greatest possible use of already available or “in-kind” resources. This type of resource is provided without charge and can be supplied in a number of ways. A District, for example, may agree to some percentage of a current employee’s regular time being used to support implementation and/or evaluation of improvement activities. The development of improvement activities that can be easily infused into the typical school day dramatically increases the likelihood of this outcome. The use of volunteers can also be viewed as an “in-kind” contribution. Using older students to mentor younger peers and training concerned parents to serve as progress monitors are both examples of resources that will cost an LEA little to nothing from a financial standpoint but are likely to make a significant, positive impact on educational outcomes.

